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SUBJECT: SECURITY COORDINATOR LTG DAYTON DISCUSSES

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS AND BORDER SECURITY WITH GOE OFFICIALS

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: U.S. Security Coordinator LTG Keith Dayton and the Ambassador discussed the recent Hamas election victory, Palestinian security, and Egyptian-Israeli border security with Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit, Defense Minister Tantawi, and Director of Military Intelligence Mowafi February 1. The GOE officials all stressed that the Hamas victory had come via a "democratic" process, and urged the U.S. not to hurt the Palestinian voters and to find a way to deal with Hamas. Tantawi affirmed Egypt's commitment to working with Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces despite the new complications. Aboul Gheit counseled against putting too many irrevocable conditions on Hamas too quickly, as that would run the risk of backing Hamas into a corner. Aboul Gheit pressed LTG Dayton to keep funds flowing to the Palestinian Authority, while Tantawi and Mowafi raised Egypt's desire to persuade Israel to allow more Egyptian troops along the Gaza border. LTG Dayton expressed USG appreciation for Egypt's role in reorganizing the Palestinian security forces and sought further coordination and cooperation in the future. Noting U.S. legal and policy restrictions on dealing with Hamas, LTG Dayton promised to work for a long-term solution and to urge calm as the parties adjust to the new political dynamic. End summary.

U.S. Must Deal With Hamas

2. (C) In separate meetings, Aboul Gheit, Tantawi, and Mowafi pressed the U.S. to deal with Hamas. Tantawi urged LTG Dayton (more than once) in their February 1 meeting to find a way "now" to deal with Hamas. Tantawi acknowledged that this would be difficult, but stressed that the Hamas victory resulted from "democracy." Thus, he said, "all of us, not just Egypt" must work with them. He also said that supporting Abu Mazen would remain critical. Aboul Gheit argued that Hamas can no longer "hide in the shadows, they must take responsibility - put up or shut up." Hamas will not achieve its goals by violence, he said, but must now negotiate. For its part, Aboul Gheit continued, the U.S. must be "fair" to Hamas and all Palestinians, the U.S. must be engaged and help the Palestinians "come to their senses." Aboul Gheit argued that the election outcome made it all the more crucial that Palestinian security reorganization continue and conclude with a united, organized national security force answerable to the Palestinian President. He expressed concern that, in their frustration at the election outcome, Fatah may turn to violence and try to "out-Hamas" Hamas.

Soothing Israel, Keeping the Money Flowing

3. (C) Tantawi asked the U.S. to encourage Israel to remain calm and noted that Egypt would do the same. Aboul Gheit asked the U.S. to "defuse Israeli defensiveness." "I assure you," Aboul Gheit said, now that they have won the election "you will see no more bullets from Hamas." It was important, Aboul Gheit added, that Israel and the U.S. not put too many "hasty conditions" on Hamas or back it into a corner. Likewise, Aboul Gheit warned against immediately cutting off funding to the Palestinians. So long as the transitional government was still in office, the money - from Israel and the donors - should keep coming, he said. Only when Hamas comes into government should the funding situation be re-examined. Aboul Gheit reported that Abu Mazen had said that the Israelis would release NIS 200 million to the PA, but Aboul Gheit could not confirm that this had happened.

Border Security

4. (C) Tantawi and Mowafi complained about periodic Israeli criticism of Egypt regarding smuggling across the Gaza border, suggesting that Egypt needed USG help to convince Israel to permit an additional Egyptian battalion on the Egyptian-Gaza border. After explaining that he had asked Vice President Cheney during their January meeting to press Israel to agree to the additional battalion, Tantawi asked LTG Dayton to engage on this issue as well. Tantawi also

noted that President Mubarak would raise the issue with the Israeli FM directly.

15. (C) LTG Dayton said to both Aboul Gheit and Tantawi that the best response to the election outcome was patience and calm. However, he also stressed that the USG could not and would not work with Hamas if Hamas did not change its approach to Israel. He pressed Egypt to work hard to make Hamas understand that. LTG Dayton noted that it may take time to convince Hamas of the way forward. He said he would urge all parties to avoid overreacting in the near-term to make progress over the long-term more likely. The vote for Hamas, he observed, was a vote for change and reform, not a vote for terror or an end to Israel. LTG Dayton also expressed the USG's gratitude for Egypt's role in reorganizing the Palestinian security forces and in persuading the forces to emphasize their national (vice factional) allegiance. Dayton said he welcomes continuing engagement with the GOE since Egypt's involvement is critical to the success of his mission.

Quartet

16. (C) The Ambassador told Aboul Gheit (after raising the subject previously with EGIS, septel/notal) that the Quartet had decided to invite Egypt (as well as Jordan and Saudi Arabia) to the next round of envoy-level Quartet meetings expected sometime in the coming weeks. The Quartet would welcome an offer from Egypt to host those meetings, the Ambassador added. Echoing EGIS Chief Soliman, Aboul Gheit welcomed the prospect of a Quartet meeting in Egypt.

Directorate of Military Intelligence

17. (C) MG Mowafi spent much of his conversation with LTG Dayton discussing Egyptian-Israeli military relations, stating that the recent creation of two "operation centers" between the two militaries along the Gaza border ("one at Rafah, one at Kerem Shalom") was a hallmark of the improved bilateral relationship. Nevertheless, Israel's withdrawal from the border had left Egypt with an enormous responsibility to ensure security and prevent smuggling. Moreover, Palestinian security personnel on the other side of the border, he said, were facilitating the smuggling. For Egypt to manage this new situation, it would need an additional 750 Border Guard Forces at the border. Mowafi also noted that direct command-command communications with the Israelis was not desirable, as such an arrangement would lead to a "loss of control."
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